



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

News Release

Office of Public Affairs
Media Relations

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 3, 1998

Washington, D.C. -- The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) National Cemetery System (NCS) will observe its 25th anniversary this month with special events at VA headquarters and national cemeteries nationwide. The theme of the anniversary -- "Pride in Our Past, Focusing on the Future" -- reflects the ongoing commitment of VA employees to honor America's veterans and their families.

The NCS was created September 1, 1973, under Public Law 93-43, which authorized the transfer of 82 national cemeteries and the government's headstone and marker program from the Department of the Army to the then Veterans Administration. Those Army cemeteries were added to 21 cemeteries already administered by VA.

The law recognized that burial in a national cemetery is a permanent expression of the American people to recognize and pay respect to those who have honorably served in the U.S. armed forces. It called for "a National Cemetery System for the interment of deceased servicemen and veterans" and declared that "all national and other veterans' cemeteries in the (system) ... shall be considered national shrines as a tribute to our gallant dead."

In the 25 years since the law's enactment, the system has grown from 103 national cemeteries to 115, most of which were originally developed in response to the Civil War. Four new national cemeteries are scheduled to open next year in Texas, Illinois, New York and Ohio. These four new cemeteries will provide additional service to more than two million veterans and will increase the system's total acreage to about 13,200, more than tripling its original size of 4,260 acres in 1973.

Since VA began administering the NCS, the number of gravesites maintained has risen from 1.2 million to more than 2.2 million and the annual interments have doubled from 36,422 to 73,000. More than 6.3 million headstones and markers have been provided by the NCS since 1973. The Presidential Memorial Certificates program, initiated in 1962 by President Kennedy, has been responsible for the delivery of more than 2.3 million certificates to the next of kin in thousands of locations around the world.

Veterans with discharges other than dishonorable, their spouses and dependent children are eligible for burial in a VA national cemetery. VA also provides grave markers or headstones for the unmarked graves of eligible veterans even if they are not buried in a national cemetery. VA does not reserve space in national cemeteries prior to the time of need. Information on VA burial benefits is available from national cemetery offices and VA regional offices.

For more information, call 1-800-827-1000, or visit the VA Home Page on the world wide web at <http://www.va.gov> or the NCS Home Page at <http://www.cem.va.gov>.